

WORKFORCE OBSERVATIONS FOR NORTHWEST WISCONSIN COUNTIES

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State of Wisconsin
Department of Workforce Development

Lower unemployment rates in March for most Northwest counties

Unemployment rates in six of the ten counties of Northwest Wisconsin declined in March, producing a drop in the regional unemployment rate from 9.8 percent in February to 9.5 percent in March. The current unemployment for the region remains higher than the 8.7 percent rate of one year ago but is lower than the March 1994 unemployment rate of 10.9 percent, three years after the end of the last recession.

The Wisconsin unemployment rate, seasonally adjusted, also declined in March to 5.7 percent from 5.8 percent in February while the national rate increased to 5.7 percent from 5.5 percent. Both the state and national rates are higher than one year ago. Not seasonally adjusted the unemployment rates in Wisconsin and the nation in March were 6.5 and 6.1 percent, respectively.

Half of the 72 counties in the state had unemployment rates at or above 7.8 percent and that included all of the ten counties in the northwest region. Even though the unemployment rate in Ashland County declined from 12.7 to 12.3 percent it was still the second highest rate in the state. Rusk County, one of the four counties in the region where unemployment increased, had the fourth highest rate with 12.1 percent unemployed.

The unemployment rate in Washburn County, ninth highest, declined from 10.8 in February to 10.2 percent in March and in Bayfield County, ranked 11, it dropped from 10.5 to 10.0 percent. The unemployment rate also declined in Burnett County from 9.6 to 9.3 percent, in Taylor County from 10.1 to 9.2 percent, and in Douglas County from 8.3 to 8.1 percent. Douglas County had the lowest unemployment rate in the region but was 32nd highest in the state.

Three other counties where the unemployment rate increased one-tenth of percentage point in March were Iron, Price, and Sawyer. The unemployment rate increased to 9.7 percent in Iron County, to 8.6 percent in

Price, and to 8.8 percent in Sawyer. In spite of the increase the unemployment rates in Price and Sawyer counties remain below the rates of one year earlier.

The changes in unemployment rates reflect very small adjustments to the estimate of employed and unemployed residents in the area. The unemployment rate in Iron County rose when the number of unemployed residents increased from 351 to 353. In Ashland County, the rate decreased four-tenths of a percentage point when the number of unemployed declined from 1,049 to 1,003. These small changes point to one of the idiosyncrasies of estimating labor force participation in small counties – and one of the reasons that the smaller counties in the state have some of the highest unemployment rates.

The total number of unemployed in Northwest Wisconsin declined from 9,240 in February to 8,930 in March. That estimate remains much higher than one

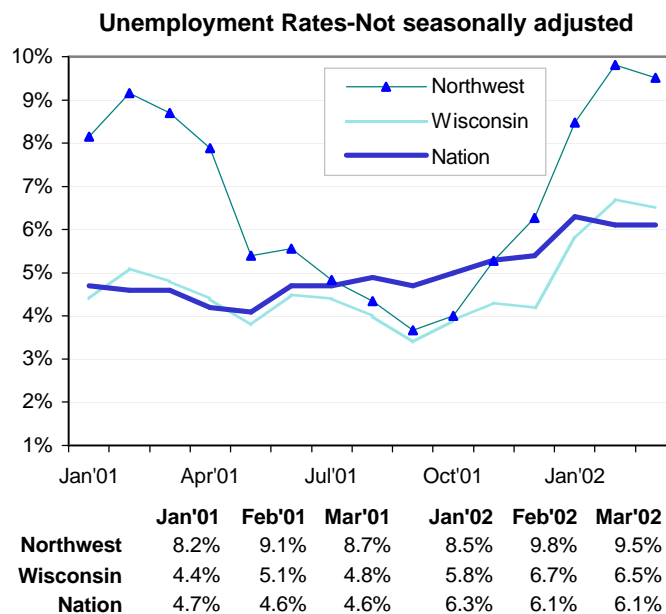
year ago when there were 7,895 unemployed in the ten-county region. The drop in the number of residents out of work is counter to the increase in the number filing claims for unemployment compensation benefits.

From mid-February to mid-March the number of claims filed for unemployment benefits increased from 5,432 to 5,602. By mid-April the number of claims decreases to 5,488. This would indicate that a seasonal reduction in unemployment and unemployment rate is on track. Another positive sign is that

the biggest reduction in claims occurred in the area's manufacturing counties.

The number of manufacturing jobs in the area increased by 170 in March but remain nearly 200 below the count of one year ago. The largest increases during the month were in Rusk and Taylor counties. Over one-third of the production jobs in the region are in these two counties.

All of the major industry divisions, except govern-



ment, reported more jobs during the month of March. The largest increase occurred in retail trade and was boosted by the opening of a Wal-Mart store in Sawyer County. Construction jobs increased by 100 in March and most counties reported more workers.

Overall, there were 700 additional jobs in the region in March and, in spite of the loss of manufacturing jobs; there are roughly 1,700 more jobs this year than twelve

months ago. Employers in retail trade and services made the greatest gains.

The additional jobs did help boost the number of total employed in the northwest region to 84,990 in March from 84,900 in February and much higher than one year ago. The increase since last March in both employment and unemployment generated an increase in the region's labor force from 90,760 in 2001 to 93,930 in 2002.

March 2002 Estimates	Wisconsin	Ashland	Bayfield	Burnett	Douglas	Iron	Price	Rusk	Sawyer	Taylor	Washburn
Civilian Labor Force*	3,049,800	8,200	7,600	7,100	23,500	3,600	7,000	7,700	10,000	11,000	8,100
Employed	2,851,100	7,200	6,900	6,500	21,600	3,300	6,400	6,700	9,200	10,000	7,300
Unemployed	198,700	1,000	800	700	1,900	400	600	900	900	1,000	800
Unemployment rate(%)	6.5%	12.3%	10.0%	9.3%	8.1%	9.7%	8.6%	12.1%	8.8%	9.2%	10.2%
Total jobs, all industries*	2,774,400	8,370	3,800	4,420	18,790	2,490	6,340	6,080	6,840	8,860	5,880
Construction & Mining	108,890	250	200	210	840	230	170	160	300	240	200
Manufacturing	563,210	1,690	200	1,020	1,300	460	2,550	2,280	770	3,120	1,090
Transportation & Pbl.Util.	130,050	270	220	140	2,540	60	120	210	180	520	230
Wholesale Trade	135,680	170	40	20	1,110	60	130	140	130	440	160
Retail Trade	490,120	1,510	610	910	3,860	580	1,010	740	1,690	1,440	1,270
Finance,Ins,Real Estate	151,300	330	130	110	500	50	210	130	300	360	200
Services	770,340	2,350	830	720	5,340	580	1,140	980	1,520	1,670	1,280
Government	424,810	1,810	1,580	1,290	3,280	470	1,010	1,440	1,950	1,070	1,460
Change from previous month											
Civilian Labor Force*	-1,700	-100	-100	-100	-100	-100	0	200	0	0	0
Employed	4,300	0	0	0	0	0	0	100	100	100	100
Unemployed	-5,900	0	0	0	-100	0	0	0	0	-100	-100
Unemployment rate(%)	-0.2%	-0.4%	-0.6%	-0.3%	-0.3%	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%	0.1%	-1.0%	-0.6%
Total jobs, all industries*	14,570	30	-40	-30	210	0	40	110	240	50	90
Construction & Mining	4,210	0	0	20	40	10	10	10	10	0	20
Manufacturing	-1,470	0	0	0	0	10	10	80	10	60	0
Transportation & Pbl.Util.	670	0	0	0	10	0	0	0	0	-10	0
Wholesale Trade	350	10	0	0	30	0	0	0	0	-10	0
Retail Trade	4,080	30	-10	10	50	0	-10	10	190	10	40
Finance,Ins,Real Estate	500	-10	0	0	0	-10	0	0	0	0	0
Services	3,520	10	-60	10	100	-20	10	20	20	30	20
Government	2,710	0	30	-60	-20	10	20	-10	10	-30	10
Change from one year ago											
Civilian Labor Force*	89,000	300	100	0	600	200	0	600	600	500	100
Employed	45,900	100	100	-100	200	200	100	400	600	600	0
Unemployed	43,100	200	100	200	400	100	-100	200	100	-100	100
Unemployment rate(%)	1.3%	2.4%	0.4%	1.8%	1.7%	0.5%	-1.3%	2.1%	-0.2%	-1.3%	0.8%
Total jobs, all industries*	-16,480	-250	240	-180	940	110	-20	190	560	280	-60
Construction & Mining	-2,400	0	20	20	100	30	20	10	30	10	30
Manufacturing	-30,830	-80	0	20	-140	10	-20	70	10	90	-150
Transportation & Pbl.Util.	-2,490	-10	10	-10	350	0	0	0	10	40	-10
Wholesale Trade	-280	0	-10	-10	40	0	-10	10	0	-10	10
Retail Trade	2,740	20	-10	30	190	20	30	20	240	40	20
Finance,Ins,Real Estate	2,490	10	0	0	-10	0	0	0	10	10	-10
Services	10,440	-90	10	-120	440	10	0	30	130	110	30
Government	3,850	-100	210	-110	-30	50	-30	60	130	-20	20

* Includes participants residing in area. ** Includes employment with employers located in area. Estimates are NOT seasonally adjusted. Current month estimates are preliminary. Totals may not add due to rounding. Calculations based on unrounded numbers.

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